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Middle East Situation Report #3
 (as of 1500 EST, 29 December 1983)

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LEBANON/SYRIA

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[redacted] security conditions were worse than normal, inhibiting movement in the capital. [redacted]

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The Lebanese Army exchanged fire today with Druze forces along the Alayh ridgeline and with Shia militiamen in southern Beirut. Most residents of Sidon participated in a general strike to protest the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon. [redacted]

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Despite Druze leader Junblatt's statements yesterday that he saw no possibility of accommodation with the Gemayel government and the Christians, he met in Damascus today with Johnny Abdu-- former head of Lebanese military intelligence and an adviser to Gemayel--to discuss a cease-fire plan proposed by Saudi negotiator Rafiq Hariri. [redacted]

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Several mostly Christian-owned businesses in West Beirut were bombed yesterday. These incidents are the latest in a series of attacks on Christian commercial establishments in recent weeks. We believe that Muslim extremists--probably Shia-- are carrying out the bombings to retaliate for a rash of kidnapings by Christian militiamen and to force Christians out of West Beirut. [redacted]

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Many Lebanese are beginning to believe that the US and the other MNF countries, frustrated by continuing casualties and by the lack of progress on national reconciliation, are looking for ways to withdraw their forces from Lebanon. Beirut newspapers display an increasing concern that an MNF withdrawal would lead to partition. [redacted]

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In a press interview, Syrian Defense Minister Talas stated that the captured US airman would not be released until the "war" with the US is over and US ships leave Lebanon's shores. [redacted]

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[redacted] travelled through the Syrian-controlled Matn region last Sunday and reported sighting a Syrian SA-8 surface-to-air missile transloader.

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-- The presence of this support equipment in the Matn, if confirmed, suggests the Syrians are prepared to use the SA-8 to defend their positions in the event of further airstrikes.

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PERSIAN GULF

Tehran reportedly has threatened the ruling Sabah family in Kuwait with reprisals if suspects in the 12 December bombings are executed.

[redacted] the ruling family has received threats from Iran that "ten al-Sabahs will be killed for each person executed."

Meanwhile, suspects under detention in connection with the bombings now include members of prominent Kuwaiti Shia families and several Shia military officers. The ruling family is split on whether to prosecute the suspects as some family members fear Iranian reprisals. In our judgment, however, failure to punish the guilty will only worsen Sunni-Shia tensions in Kuwait and encourage Iranian-backed Shia dissidents to new acts of sabotage.

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The US Military Training Mission Club in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia received an anonymous telephone bomb threat today. The club was searched and no bomb found. Dhahran is in the largely Shia Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

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The US Consulate in Marseille was informed by a local journalist that Shia Muslims belonging to "The Muslim Brothers" (NFI) were planning an attack against the Consulate. The journalist had received the information from [redacted] who claimed to have spoken with two members of the "Brothers." No specific dates were given, but the two said Libyans were involved, possibly the Libyan Charge in Marseille.

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The War

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There have been no significant developments in the Iran-Iraq war.

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